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Affirmation

United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Concerns

Spring 1995 Volume 20 Number 1

National Gathering Not To Be Missed

Members and friends of AFFIRMATION who have not yet registered for the upcoming National Gathering may want to reconsider. The April 21-23 event will be held in Dallas, Texas, and will be the only national gathering this year.

Keynote speaker Morris Floyd will offer a Biblical and theological framework for the experiences of those working on same-gender sexuality issues in the church. Entitled *A Chosen People?* the talk will provoke thoughtful reflection both on the history of our movement and about the opportunities that still lie ahead. Morris has been a member of AFFIRMATION (and its predecessor organization *Gay United Methodists*) since 1976, a co-spokesperson from 1982 to 1988 and 1990 to 1992, and is currently a member of the National Council. One of a handful of openly lesbian, gay or bi-

Please turn to page three...

Human Rights Witness Planned for General Conference

DENVER (UMNS)--The 1,000 delegates to the 1996 session of United Methodism's top law-making body will take time from their legislative agenda to make a public witness for human rights for all people, including gay men and lesbians.

The Commission on General Conference, which oversees planning for the quadrennial, international session, voted unanimously at its Nov. 18-19 meeting to provide time during

Please turn to page three...

Affirmation's Name Revisited at National Council Meeting

The National Council revisited the issue of Affirmation's name at a recent meeting in Las Vegas in January. Originally, Affirmation's name did not include the term "bisexual." Although there have always been bisexuals who were very active in Affirmation's cause, their orientation was not represented in Affirmation's name. Affirmation members have privately discussed this issue amongst themselves for sometime now and have also questioned the need to recognize

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**Self-Avowed Practicing Homosexual*

Platform Statement *(from the Witness Committee)*. 11

The National Gathering
Dallas, Texas April 21-23, 1995
Please see insert for details and Registration Form
Deadline for Registering is March 31

UM Churches Welcoming Gays Mark Record Growth

Fifteen United Methodist churches declared themselves Reconciling Congregations in 1994--the largest number in this growing movement's ten-year history.

Reconciling Congregations publicly welcome all persons, regardless of sexual orientation. Initiated in 1984 in response to church policies and attitudes which were unwelcoming toward lesbian, gay and bisexual persons and their families, the movement now encompasses 87 Reconciling Congregations across the U.S.

A newer branch of this movement, Reconciling Campus Ministries, began in 1992 when the Wesley Foundation at the University of California at Los Angeles declared itself "reconciling" and urged other campus ministries to do so. Two new Reconciling Campus Ministries in 1994 (at American University, Washington, DC, and Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL) brings the total to five welcoming campus ministries.

"There is clearly a groundswell of interest and support for Reconciling Congregations and Campus Ministries across the country," noted program coordinator Mark Bowman. "Churches have cast judgment on gay and lesbian persons for too long. Many more Christians are now saying, 'That is not the good news of Jesus Christ.' Churches instead are extending a hand of hospitality and love."

"The word is getting out about vital, growing churches which are reaching out to lesbian and gay persons and their families," Bowman continued. "We continue to get new inquiries about Reconciling Congregations each week. This movement is transforming the church."

In light of its continued growth, the Reconciling Congregation Program also added a full-time outreach coordinator in 1w994. The Rev. James Preston from Lubbock, Texas, joined the four-person national staff in October. Preston will expand the program's efforts to contact and support the many churches and campus ministries seeking to be "reconciling."

Don't Forget. . . .

The National Gathering in Dallas!

ALL REGISTRATIONS MUST BE IN BY MARCH 31

Council Gathers for Annual Meeting

On January 14-16 the Affirmation Council met for its annual week-end long meeting. Many thanks go out to the Wesley Church of North Las Vegas, especially the pastor, Sarah Shirley, and the Wesley United Methodist Women for the welcome, hospitality, and good food given to us.

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.....much was accomplished.

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As is the case with most of these Council meetings much time was spent working in the various committees. As will undoubtedly be evident throughout this newsletter much was accomplished. The Program Committee continues to prepare for our Spring Gathering in Dallas, and the regional gatherings planned for the Fall of this year. They are also working on a revision of the guidelines for local groups hosting a National Gathering. The Witness Committee's focus was on our presence at General Conference in 1996 and legislation including Affirmation's platform statement. The Evangelism Committee continues to monitor our newsletter, membership and mailbox. It also presented to the Council a proposal for the revitalization of the Regional Organizing Program. The Stewardship Committee's work involved the unending task of monitoring the income and outgo of funds and began to prepare for the presentation of the 1995-1996 budget to the Council at the April meeting. The Planning and Evaluation Committee focused on the functioning of the Council, the filling of vacancies on the Council, the election of a representative on the RCP Board, the travel pool, meeting sites for future meetings and an amendment to the By-Laws.

As a whole Council we discussed Council goals for 1995, our continuing commitment to inclusiveness

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...we are family who care and love one another...

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as an organization, especially of bisexual and transgendered persons, the separation agreement between Affirmation and the Reconciling Congregation Program which expires in March of this year and General Conference. There were times of laughter and times of tears. There was

Please turn to page eleven...

National...from page one

sexual clergy who have served under appointment in the United Methodist Church, he is now in the retired relationship to the California-Pacific Annual Conference.

The gathering will provide participants a variety of ways to interact with each other under the theme "Capturing the Tradition--Responding to the Challenge." Six workshop options will offer skills and insights critical to building the movement. A special worship time will allow for the acknowlegement and memorializing of our losses. And a Texas style banquet with live entertainment will be an occasion to celebrate Affirmation's current work and those who have contributed to it.

The weekend will close with a festival worship celebration featuring the preaching of Chris Smith, associate professor of preaching and worship at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. Formerly United Methodist, Chris moved her denominational relationship to the United Church of Christ, which affirms the participation of openly gay and lesbian persons in the ordained ministry. She is the author of *Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance: Radical Response to Radical Evil,* which she describes as illustrating her commitments as feminist, lesbian and theologian.

Everyone on the AFFIRMATION mailing list should have received a brochure and detailed registration information about the National Gathering during January. The event will be held at the Harvey Hotel (formerly the Southland Center Hotel) on Olive Street in Dallas, where a special rate of $62 per night for 1 to 4 persons in the room has been arranged. The registration fee runs from $30 to $110 on a sliding scale basis and includes a commemorative T-shirt. If you want to register or need more information, contact the national office by calling [redacted] writing the Evanston P.O. Box, or sending e-mail to UMAFFIRM@AOL.COM.

Human Rights...from page one

the two-week assembly for the human rights' witness.

The commission's decision came in response to church members who criticized holding the 1996 General Conference in Denver after Colorado voters earlier approved an amendment prohibiting laws that guarantee special protection of human rights for gays and lesbians. Implementation of the amendment was subsequently blocked by Colorado courts.

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..."the strongest possible witness..."

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After that controversial decision to keep the conference in Denver, commission members asked its program unit to provide some means for delegates "to make the strongest possible witness in behalf of the civil rights of all persons."

The Rev. William Quick, Detroit, program chairman, will appoint a group to determine the precise content of that witness, proposed for the morning of April 18, 1996, the third day of the international lawmaking session.

As the Commission on General Conference considered human rights and the push for more inclusiveness, members also wrestled with the challenges presented by the increasing number of non-English-speaking General Conference delegates.

At the 1996 assembly 138 delegates--up from 30 in 1992--will be from outside the United States. Translators have been provided for the floor proceedings, but written materials have been in English.

The commission called for a study on possible translation of major portions of the *Daily Christian Advocate,* which carries proposed legislation, agency reports, information about delegates, and a transcript of daily proceedings.

The commission agreed to investigate the cost of providing materials in large print or Braille to aid delegates with visual impairments.

In a related action, the commission agreed to pay expenses for a person who must accompany and assist delegates with handicapping conditions.

Headin' East

The Planning and Evaluation Committee of the Affirmation Council is responsible for the site selection for our National Gatherings. Since our last meeting was on the west coast, our next meeting is in the Southcentral part of the country and General Conference is in Denver this committee is currently looking to the east for a site for the Fall '96 gathering. In keeping with the Long Range Plan of Affirmation to have one meeting a year in a retreat/hotel setting the investigation into a site is focusing on these types of places. Keep looking to the newsletter for an announcement as soon as the site is confirmed.

Name...from page one

other groups who also experience discrimination due to their

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...National Council...agreed to add "Bisexual" to its name.

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sexual orientation. This includes bisexuals as well as trans-gendered persons. In 1991, the National Council of Affirmation, after many heated debates, agreed to add "Bisexual" to its name. The discussion still continues today--even more so. The National Council revisited this topic and will continue to examine the unanswered questions.

The unanswered questions

There are some local Affirmation chapters which do not agree to this name change. There are members who strongly feel that bisexuals have one foot in the closet. They are not fully accepting their sexuality. This attitude has shunned the bisexual community from the gay as well as the straight communities. "Don't give bisexuals a hard time for being bi," states Ken Hanes in his book *The Gay Guys Guide to Life.* "They can't control their attractions to both genders anymore than you can control your attraction to one."

At Affirmation's West Hollywood Gathering, there was a workshop titled *Sex in the Church.* It was led by Connie

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...workshop dealt with issues that the church ignores.

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Norman. She describes herself as an "ex-drag queen, ex-hooker, ex-IV user, ex-high risk youth and current 43 year old post-operative transsexual woman who is HIV positive." Her workshop dealt with issues that the church ignores. Ms. Norman pointed out that if lesbians and gays are rejected by the church once, she has been rejected at least six fold. Are her characteristics part of the lesbian and gay community? The participants of this workshop believed that Ms. Norman was part of the community, including the church community.

If, as stated in its mission statement, "Affirmation is a community...[which] celebrate[s] the affectional/sexual orientation of all persons, why is this discussion going on? Does Affirmation need to define that "all persons" means everyone but bisexuals, trans-gender, the gay homeless person living on the street, the gay IV drug-users, hookers, the gay youth, etc.? The list goes on and on. Can Affirmation recognize **ALL** persons as being people of self worth and, as such, open up Affirmation to be a truly inclusive organization, as its Mission/Vision Statements proclaim?

Rev. Dr. John Rice

It is with great sadness that we report the death of the Rev. Dr. John Stewart Rice on Tuesday, November 8th after a tragic automobile accident in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Dr. Rice was an Associate Minister on the staff of Wilshire UMC in Los Angeles from 1984 to 1988, with special emphasis in the area of worship and music. John left Wilshire to form his own consulting firm, *Worship Works*, which assisted local churches and church leaders in the area of effective worship.

John's special gifts in worship were highlighted by the national telecast of Wilshire's 1985 Easter Festival Service on ABC television.

John is survived by his partner Dr. Brian Davison, his daughter Cathlin Rice, his mother Doris Rice and two brothers. Memorial gifts may be directed to *Worship Works* c/o the family at [redacted] Knoxville, TN [redacted] or to National Affirmation. *(Information provided by Affirmation/Los Angeles and Paul Thompson.)*

New RCP Board Member

Maggie Roe from Denver, CO, has been elected by the Affirmation Council to serve on the Reconciling Congregation Program's Board of Directors as a representative from Affirmation. She will be serving on the Board until April of 1996, completing the term of Jan Olson who resigned due to new job responsibilities. Maggie served on Affirmation's Coordinating Committee at the time Affirmation and the Reconciling Congregation Program signed its formal separation agreement.

A Call For Memorabilia

The 20th Anniversary National Gathering is fast approaching! If you haven't yet started hunting for memorabilia to bring for display, we hope this reminder prompts you to do so right away. In addition to the photographs and other items you bring for display, we are still needing photos, slides, movies and video tape to be used for composition into an Affirmation history video for the opening session April 21. Send these no later than March 10, 1995, to Judy WestLee, [redacted] Minneapolis, MN [redacted]

Understanding SAPH*

*"Self Avowed Practicing Homosexual," and how to define for inclusion in and in relation to various sections of the *Book of Discipline.*

One Point of View

It is worth noting that while the debate over SAPH at our last Council Meeting was both passionate and emotional, it was neither bitter nor divisive. It seems that each side has deep sympathy for the concerns of the other, yet come to differing conclusions for strategic and principled reasons.

I was among those who argued to adopt a "narrow definition" of SAPH for practical and strategic reasons. The definition suggested reads:

> "A 'self-avowed, practicing homosexual' is a person who declares to the Board of Ordained Ministry that he/she has engaged in genital sexual practices with a person of the same gender in the two year period immediately preceding the avowal."

It may be rightly argued that to be defined by one narrow aspect of our lives (genital behavior) is unjust and dehumanizing. Our challenge is to create opportunities for justice making within a system which unjustly deploys such definitions. When some whom God has called are excluded, perhaps we are called to be "as wise as serpents." I argue for a "narrow definition" of SAPH, because it provides some "wiggle room" for those who choose to hold on to their call to ministry within the context of the church's current hypocrisy. Many believe that there will be a strong push for a universal definition (as opposed to leaving it to each Annual Conference or BOOM). A definition which is very specific as to the context and content of that "self-avowal" provides that "wiggle room" which other definitions surely will not.

A further argument for a "narrow definition" is that it is what its critics claim: unjust, ignorant, dehumanizing to define any group of persons by one characteristic. As church and society have struggled to understand racism and sexism, that pattern has been recognized as unjust and inherently evil. Perhaps in self-reflection, or more likely in Judicial Council challenge, this definition can be the mirror which reflects to the church its sinful heterosexism and homophobia.

Rebecca Ruth Richards

Push or Pass

(Another Point of View)

The chaotic current of the late 20th century pushes up hard against those of us who seek to be in balance with it. Is it time to push or pass?

Artist Jolene Rickard

The definition of a "self-avowed, practicing homosexual" is being left up to interpretation by Annual Conference. This is due to a recent Judicial Council decision. Some Annual Conferences have interpreted this to mean, for instance, an individual telling their Board of Ordained Ministry that they are a homosexual. Other Annual Conferences have interpreted it as an individual's disclosure that he/she has homosexual thoughts or dreams. As you can see, there is wide variation in the Annual Conferences' definition of this statement. We believe that there will be many proposals defining the statement at the next General Conference. Should Affirmation hold firm on eliminating this statement from the *Book of Discipline* (the United Methodist book of law)? Or should Affirmation lead the way at General Conference to define exactly what the definition should be, since this issue will certainly be brought to the General Conference floor? The question boils down to, do we stand firm on Affirmation's principles or join the fight of the "lesser of two evils"--i.e., is it time to push or pass?

There is no correct answer to this complicated issue. National Affirmation Council has been unable to reach consensus on this issue despite much discussion. The following are arguments on both sides of the issue.

No matter how strong we are lobbied internally, by our allies, and by our detractors, National Affirmation must -- at all cost -- stand firm in opposition to the adoption of any and all definitions of "self-avowed, practicing homosexual" by the 1996 General Conference. While this may not be the most politically popular stance to take, it is the only Christian alternative we have.

There are, I believe, four solid reasons for assuming this posture.

First, the definition of who I am as a gay man is much more far-reaching than what I do in bed. Any attempt to categorize me on the basis of my genital activity is to dehumanize and devalue me.

Please turn to page eight...

Judicial Council...from page ten

The council ruled West Virginia's attempts to define "self-avowed practicing" illegal because it includes the possibility of having a person declared homosexual based on witness testimony.

The court ruled that inclusion of a third person is not equivalent to self-avowal, and that any adequate definition must specify to whom avowal must be made.

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...past or present act..admismisible...but not a future...

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California Pacific's definition is flawed because "intends to engage in...," the high court said. Council members agreed that a past or present act may be admissible as evidence, but not a future possibility which may or may not occur.

Issues pertaining to homosexuality were among the 24 docket items addressed by the Judicial Council, eight of which were deferred for lack of time until next spring's session.

"Strength for the Journey" Founder Dies

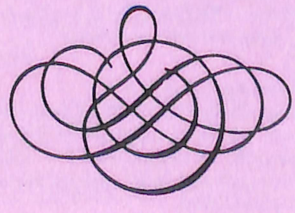
The Rev. Dr. Lambert W. (Bert) All died on Friday, Jan. 20, 1995, at his home in Pasadena from complications due to AIDS. His mother, sister and brother, all from New York, had visited him the week before his death. In addition to the loving support of birth family, Bert was surrounded and supported throughout his illness by the many friends who had become something of an extended family under Bert's "parenting."

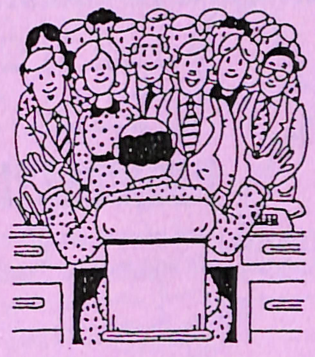
Bert All is probably best known in the gay community as the founder of the "Strength for the Journey" retreats for persons with HIV/AIDS. Under the sponsorship of the United Methodist Church, the annual retreats are known as a safe place for persons from various (or no) religious backgrounds. The "Strength for the Journey" retreats were begun by Bert in 1988, while he was Director of Camping Ministries for the regional office of the United Methodist Church, and modeled after similar retreats in New York.

Under Bert's leadership the "Strength for the Journey" grew from one retreat in the Los Angeles area and one in the San Diego area, to include an Orange County retreat and a retreat for women only. During the past year more than 200 persons attended retreats as participants and/or leaders.

In 1992 the Lambert W. All Fund was established to provide scholarships to enable persons to attend these retreats. Bert also was a member of the Conference AIDS Ministry Committee, serving as chair or co-chair of the Committee from 1992 until his death, as well as being named by Bishop Jack Tuell to the AIDS Interfaith Network.

In addition to his volunteer work with Affirmation (he was a co-founder of L.A. Affirmation) and "Strength for the Journey," Bert served as pastor of United Methodist Churches in several California communities, as well as Conference Director of Camping, Outdoor and Retreat Ministries.





How *YOU* Can Become Involved In National Affirmation

An organization can only be as strong as its members' commitment to it. That means all members as they're able, not just a select few. Currently, there are excellent opportunities for increased involvement and commitment to Affirmation. At the National Gathering in Dallas this April we will be electing five new council members to serve as at-large members for a three year term. The Council is accepting nominations for these positions.

Another opportunity for involvement is as a member of a Nominating Committee. This committee will be responsible for presenting a slate of nominations to the membership at the Spring gatherings where at-large members are elected. It is also responsible, with the help of the Affirmation staff person, for running the mail ballot election every third year to elect regional representatives to Affirmation's Council.

If you, or someone you know, is ready to take a more active role in Affirmation contact Jan Olson at [redacted]. Also, feel free to contact her with any questions you may have on the two opportunities listed above or for other ways you may be able to help make *your* organization strong.

NATIONAL AFFIRMATION GATHERING

April 21-23, 1995

Dallas, Texas

REGISTRATION FORM

To register, each person should complete a separate form and mail to:

National Affirmation
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204
(708) 733-9590
Internet: UMAFFIRM@AOL.COM

DEADLINE: MARCH 31, 1995

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NAME (as it is to appear on your Name Badge)_____

ADDRESS _____

CITY_____ STATE_____ ZIP _____

TELEPHONE (_____)_____

I DESIRE PRIVATE HOUSING (Cannot be guaranteed; Deadline March 24) _____
(see brochure for hotel reservations instructions)

SPECIAL NEEDS_____

IS THIS YOUR FIRST AFFIRMATION GATHERING? _____YES _____NO

RESERVATIONS FOR SATURDAY BANQUET *ONLY*_____ (No. of reservations)

AFFIRMATION ANNIVERSARY T-SHIRT INCLUDED IN REGISTRATION. CIRCLE YOUR SIZE.
(Available in Adult sizes S, M, L, XL, 2X, 3X)

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

REGISTRATION FEE $_____

Income	Fee
Student/Subsistence	$ 30.00
Under $20,000/year	50.00
$20,001 - $30,000/year	75.00
$30,001 - $40,000/year	100.00
Over $40,000/year	110.00
Saturday Banquet only	20.00 (no T-Shirt included)

I am enclosing an additional amount to enable another person to attend: $_____

Additional T-Shirt(s) @ $10.00 each (Indicate the number and sizes on back.) $_____

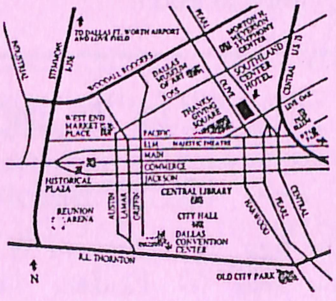
TOTAL ENCLOSED (Check made payable to National Affirmation) $_____
(Please feel free to copy and distribute this form!!)

SOUTHLAND CENTER HOTEL

The Harvey Hotel, formerly known as the Southland Center Hotel, will be the site of National Affirmation's Twentieth Anniversary Gathering. The Harvey Hotel is nestled comfortably inside the shimmering skyline of downtown Dallas. It is an artful blend of elegant stone and rich teakwood, sculpted together to create an air of comfort and refinement.

Room fees for the Gathering are a flat $62.00 per room per night for up to four people. Parking at the hotel is available for $2.00 per night. Super Shuttles to and from the airports are available at $11.00 per person one way.

To make reservations at the hotel, call 1-800-272-8007 and make reservations at **The Harvey Hotel** on Olive Street in Dallas. Tell them you are with the "Affirmation" group for the weekend of April 21-23, 1995. **Request a renovated room.** Anyone desiring names of persons looking for room mates should call National Affirmation at (708) 733-9590 or by writing P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204. You may also reach National Affirmation through the Internet at UMAFFIRM@AOL.COM. National Affirmation accepts no responsibility for room mate assignments. All persons are responsible for making their own reservations with **The Harvey Hotel.**



Tentative Schedule

Friday, April 21 - Opening Session:
Registration will begin at 6:00 pm. At 7:00 pm, the opening session will include a brief worship service and then an evening of high energy multi-media history activities. *Design Team: Judy Cayot, Mary Gaddis, and Judy WestLee*

Saturday, April 22
Opening worship at 8:30 followed by a Keynote Address by **Morris Floyd** entitled "The Chosen People." Morris has been an Affirmation member since 1976, and Affirmation Co-spokesperson from 1982-88 and 1990-92. He is a retiree of the California/Pacific Annual Conference. This Keynote address will be followed by a Panel of Responders and a smorgasbord of response options (art, movement, writing, dialogue, etc.) *Design Team: Jeanne Knepper, Alice Knotts, Maggie and Ben Roe, and Ed Hanson.*

Afternoon Workshops:
1. Confronting Internalized Homophobia.
2. Professionals: Clergy and Lay in the Church.
3. Local and Regional Organizing: Growing Chapters and Developing Plans for Regional Conferences.
4. Sharing the Good News: Our Spiritual Journeys in the Church and in "Our" Community.
5. Growing in Affirmation: Bisexual Stories.
6. Transcending the Narrow Understanding of Gender: Transgender Stories.

Design team: Tim Tyner, Rod Sprott, Sandy Long, and Rebecca Richards.

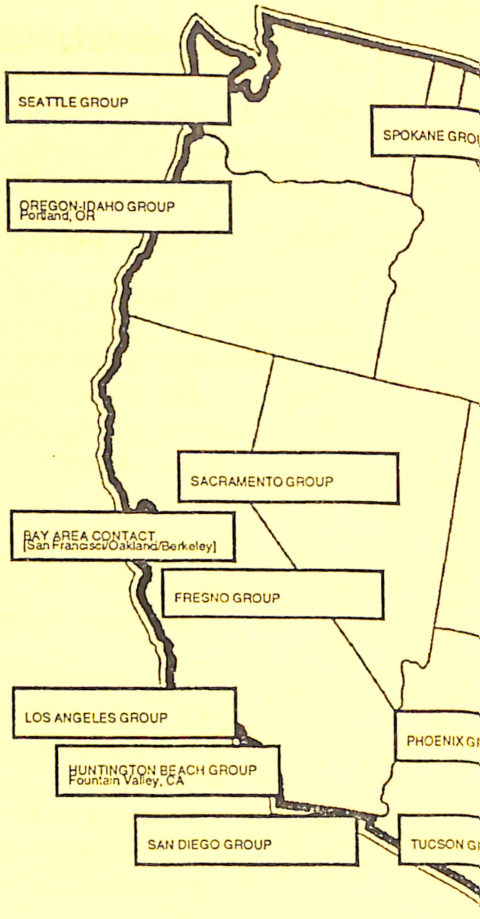
Saturday, April 22 (con't)
Evening - Affirmation's *20th Anniversary Banquet* including entertainment and brief presentations. *Design Team: Dallas Affirmation in conjunction with the National Affirmation Council.*

Sunday, April 23 - Closing Session (concludes by Noon):
1½-2 hour Festival Worship (preaching, singing, liturgy, brass and drums, etc.). The preacher for this event will be **Chris Smith**, who is the Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. In 1992, she published Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Response to Radical Evil. Her writings, as well as her preaching, reflect her commitments as feminist, lesbian, and theologian. *Design Team: Gloria Soliz, Perry Wiggins, Randy Miller, Fritz Shultz, and Beth Richardson.*

The overall design teams for this event is the National Council Program Committee: Morris Floyd, Kathryn Mitchem, Gloria Soliz, and Judy WestLee.

Affirmation National Council

Jeanne Barnett, Sacramento, CA
Tom Russell, Washington, DC
Robert Bryant, Raleigh, NC
Gloria Soliz, San Francisco, CA
John R. Calhoun, Oklahoma City, OK
Paul Thompson, Studio City, CA
Ellie Charlton, Sacramento, CA
Judith WestLee, Minneapolis, MN
Morris Floyd, Minneapolis, MN
Mark Wilson, Tuscaloosa, AL
David L. Gunnell, Evanston, IL
Jeanne Knepper, Portland, OR
Nancy Levan, Fresno, CA
Jan Olson, Chicago, IL
Sam Wilson, Dallas, TX
Ann Freeman Price, Nyack, NY
Rick Huskey, Washington, DC
One Woman in Maryland
One Man in Chicago
One Woman in Tennessee



Two New Council Members Elected

An election in the Northeast Jurisdictional Region was recently held to fill the unexpired term of Brian Smith, who resigned from Affirmation's Council in 1994. That election resulted in a tie between Ann Freeman Price of Nyack, NY, and Rick Huskey of Washington, DC. Upon learning the results of the election Rick graciously withdrew his nomination and Ann officially became the Northeast Jurisdiction's representative on the Council, where she will serve until April of 1997. Since the death of Jay McCarty from Kansas City left another position on the Council vacant, Rick was asked to complete Jay's unexpired term as an at-large member of the Council. He will serve until April of 1996. Welcome, Ann and Rick!

LOCAL

Dallas Affirmation has been busy planning for the National Affirmation 20th Anniversary meeting in April. Pam Whatley, a volunteer with the Candy Marcum Institute for Women's Study spoke on the various women's organizations in the Dallas community. In December, Dallas Affirmation held a Christmas Candlelight Service and dessert only "no calorie" potluck. The group also adopted a family in the Christmas Gift project. The January meeting honored Rev. Sheron C. Patterson as the speaker at their monthly meeting. Rev. Patterson holds the distinction of being the first and only African American woman to be ordained a deacon and an elder in the North Texas Annual Conference (UMC). The group usually meets every fourth Monday at 7:00 pm, at Northaven UMC, 11211 Preston Road at Northaven Road. The Third Sunday Lunches are regular gatherings of Affirmation members and their friends. For additional information write to [redacted], Dallas, Texas [redacted].

Affirmation Los Angeles begins its 14th year at a new meeting site at Holman UMC located at 3320 West Adams Boulevard. In November, Rev. Sharon Rodes-Wickett, led a service of 'Hope and Remembrance" at Westwood UMC. Participants had the opportunity to remember those who have died of breast cancer and AIDS. In December the group participated in United Methodist night at Disneyland. Later that month, the Kings of Cuisine, Bob Klein and Bob Ficklin hosted the group's Christmas bash. In January the group helped
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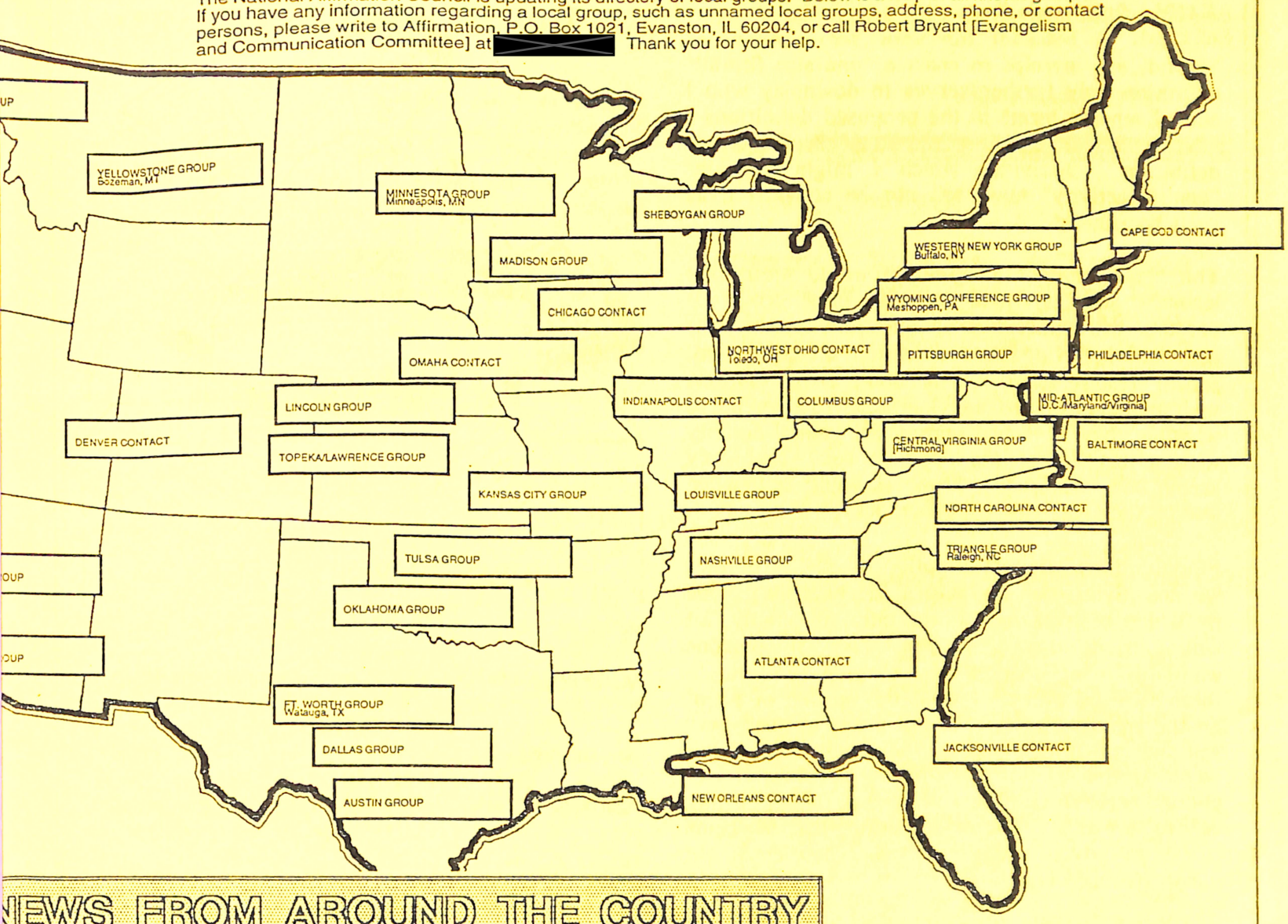
The National Affirmation Council is updating its directory of local groups. Below is a map of all known groups. If you have any information regarding a local group, such as unnamed local groups, address, phone, or contact persons, please write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204, or call Robert Bryant [Evangelism and Communication Committee] at [redacted] Thank you for your help.



NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY

elebrate the life of wood UMC. Bert was of Affirmation Los ill be missed. ngeles meets the each month for refreshments and n UMC at 7:00 p.m. on write to [redacted] ood, CA [redacted] or call

rmation met with Eucharist with the zky, a Nashville as the celebrant meeting of the two r, has become an After a potluck groups heard a nships". Due to the holidays, the group met a week earlier than usual for a potluck and a time to share favorite Christmas stories, poetry, and music. The group also collected toys and money for the Bethlehem Center's Christmas ministry. In January, George Hurst, a long-time volunteer for Nashville Cares spoke to the group about the work of the organization and its plans for the future. Nashville Affirmation meets monthly for a potluck and a time of fellowship at Edgewood UMC, 1502 Edgehill Avenue. For information about monthly meetings and other activities write to Affirmation, P.O. Box 24213, Nashville, TN 37202.

Affirmation of Wyoming Conference meets weekly for a worship service every Sunday at 7:00-8:30 pm in the Narthex of Tabernacle UMC, 83 Main St. Binghamton, New York. The worship services are led by a variety of service leaders. In November, the group heard Marcel Duhamel speak about his experience with Reconciliation Programs at Chenango UMC. In December, the group participated in World AIDS Day activities. The group also celebrated its fourth anniversary in December by sharing memories and stories. Service leaders change weekly This group has an incredible ministry and a wide range of programs. For more information write to [redacted] Binghamton, NY [redacted] or call [redacted]

Please turn to page nine...

SAPH...from page five

Second, any attempt to enact a "one size fits all" definition only further serves to downplay who I am. Even the terms in the proposed definitions I have seen would require the adoption of further definition. Activities which I might consider "genital activity" may well not be considered as such by others!

Third, adoption of a definition would mean that lesbians and gay men are the only group of persons who must answer questions about their bedroom behavior as a condition of ordination. and/or consecration. Why don't those persons who are identified as non-gay have to respond to whether they have had consensual genital activity with a member of the opposite sex? That only seems fair. But such a proposal would be laughed out of the General Conference hall.

Fourth, if we support adoption of any definition, we are giving our detractors the necessary rope by which to hang us. I, for one. am simply not willing to do their work for them! If someone wants to bring charges against me, let them do their own discovery. I want the burden of proof on the charging party; I'm not about to hand over self-incriminating evidence voluntarily. And, if I were to fail to do that, then I would have to choose between lying and remaining faithful to my call to ministry. The organization that proclaims to be my advocate can't, in clear conscience, put me in that position!

This is a difficult choice for National Affirmation to make. But, we are living in difficult times and we simply can't afford to take the easy way out. I know full well that our agreement to support adoption of a "liberal" definition would make life a lot easier for our allies; I appreciate that. But my conscience and my faith call me to do otherwise. Anything less would, at best, be unchristian!

A Gay Man from Chicago

EDITOR'S NOTE: Any comments should be sent to LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, Affirmation Newsletter, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204.

1995 NEWSLETTER DEADLINES

DEADLINE DATE		PUBLICATION DATE
	SUMMER	
April 26, 1995		May 19, 1995
	FALL	
July 16, 1995		August 11, 1995
	WINTER	
October 25, 1995		November 17, 1995

All submissions should be sent to:
National Affirmation
P.O. Box 1021
Evanston, IL 60204

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Register TODAY for the National Gathering in DALLAS!

SEE INSERT FOR DETAILS & REGISTRATION

Notice from the Program Committee

This is to serve notice of our intent to consider and possibly amend the By-laws at the next full meeting of Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns, Inc.

Report of NCCC Annual Meeting

National Affirmation Councilperson Sam Wilson attended the National Council of Churches of Christ annual meeting in New Orleans last November. As you may be aware, MCC (Metropolitan Community Churches) has been seeking membership in the NCC for over a decade. Although they meet all membership criteria, they have not won a majority vote of the general board which consists of 300+ delegates from 30+ denominations. MCC requested each of the major G/L/B religious organizations to send a rep or two to the New Orleans meeting. Sam was selected to represent National Affirmation.

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NCC...from page nine

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"Actions in the name of religion frequently codify and legitimize violations of human rights..."

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There was considerable discussion about whether or not to accept the document, but the issues were about grammatics and readability, not content. The inclusion of sexual orientation was not an issue, in fact one amendment was to add the sentence: "Actions in the name of religion frequently codify and legitimize violations of human rights, in particular of people living in multi-faith commitments and persons of differing sexual orientations." The amendment was easily adopted after a few minutes of discussion on how to phrase the last three words, but the meaning was not an issue. Remember: This was 150 people of differing Christ-centered denominations agreeing ...and the Methodists and Episcopalians were in the forefront!

Another sentence that immediately follows a sentence on sexual orientation is actually apologetic: "The contemporary human rights movement has raised our consciousness about conditions long ignored or accepted as normative, and brought into focus tragic new dimensions of social change and conflict."

On Saturday afternoon MCC sponsored an event called "Confronting the Religious Right." A three-person panel witnessed how they have successfully confronted the Religious Right at times in their lives. Mel White (a former ghost-writer for several religious-right preachers) shared his insight.

All the reps of the G/L/B groups coordinated well. The reps will meet again in early 1995 to plan the strategy for the next NCC annual meeting and to coordinate with the National Gay/Lesbian Task Force Leadership Conference which has requested the assistance of our church-related groups.

Affirmation to Meet in Regions This Fall

In an earlier issue of this newsletter Affirmation announced the decision to designate a two year period in which only one national gathering would be held each year, in order to make room for regional gatherings each of those two years. We have arrived at that time! We are looking forward to this opportunity for many more of Affirmation's members and friends to be part of a gathering. Preliminary conversations have begun about possible sites for the five

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[Do] you have ideas for your region's fall 1995 gathering [?]

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regional gatherings (the regions will correspond to United Methodism's five jurisdictions in the United States). At the April 21-23, 1995, National Gathering a time will be set aside for participants to gather by regions and proceed with exploration and decisions regarding date, place, leadership and next steps. If you have ideas for your region's fall 1995 gathering and/or interest in helping it happen, plan to be part of the session in Dallas in April. You may also mail your comments to Affirmation, P.O. Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204, or call Affirmation's new telephone number (708) 733-9590.

Judicial Council Overturns Definitions

BERKELEY, Calif. (UMNS)--Attempts by two regional judicatories to define homosexuality for the purpose of determining fitness for the ministry were overturned here Oct. 26-28 by the "supreme court" of the United Methodist Church.

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...attempts...to define the phrase...illegal...

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The nine-member Judicial Council ruled that attempts by the West Virginia and California Pacific annual conferences to define the phrase "self-avowed practicing homosexual" were illegal, according to the denomination's Constitution.

In previous session, the Judicial Council has ruled that each annual conference must define for itself the phrase "self-avowed practicing homosexual" since review, selection and ordination of ministers is done at the annual conference level.

Please turn to page six-A...

Council...from page two

the ever present feeling of frustration at the amount of work to be done and the limited time available to us. And there was a powerful reminder, perhaps a strong nudge from God through a sudden and scary (and thankfully treated successfully) illness of one of the Council members, that we are individuals on a common journey, we are family who care and love one another and that though the work can be overwhelming at times we need to take the time to share with one another in the present and not wait until tomorrow or next week or...

TRAVEL POOL UPDATE

Affirmation members who have been involved with the organization on the national level for many years will be aware of the travel pool. For those who are new to Affirmation or have never attended a national gathering a little explanation is appropriate. The travel pool was created in an attempt to equalize the cost of travel to a national gathering for those in attendance. At the gathering participants were asked to report their travel costs and the average cost was calculated. Anyone who paid more that the average could ask that the difference be reimbursed to them. Likewise, anyone who paid less than the average travel cost was asked to donate the difference to Affirmation. This system allowed some people to come to a gathering who may otherwise not have been able to attend. But it also put a burden on the local participants. Often times Affirmation needed to supplement the funds in the travel pool to make reimbursements.

The Council's Planning and Evaluation Committee has periodically looked at this program in an attempt to structure it in a way that would not put a burden on Affirmation or local participants of a national gathering. At the January Council meeting the issue was again discussed. It was decided that since we have not had the travel pool at the last few meetings and no one commented about it's absence negatively we would officially discontinue the Travel Pool.

PLATFORM STATEMENT
And Grace Will Lead Us Home

(PRESENTED BY THE WITNESS COMMITTEE)

Through many dangers, toil and snares, we have already come.
'Tis grace has lead us safe thus far, and grace will lead us home.

We are Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns, and we proclaim God's amazing grace. Our church has taught us to sing out our confidence that God promises good, to set aside our fears, and to know that God will be our shield and portion as long as life endures.

In our lives and in the life of the church, we have known dangers, toils, and snares. We have met homophobia: discrimination, denial of our gifts and hateful abuse. We've listened to language that denies our identity and denigrates our loves. We've been driven from our call to ministry. We've known a church more willing to accept our dollars than our gifts. All too often, we've known the church as graceless, hateful, and punitive.

And yet we affirm: grace will lead us home. As United Methodists and as Affirmation we hold a vision of a church that proclaims God's grace to and for all. As individuals and as a church we have lived by narrow vision and short sight. We have held grudges and old legislation long past the time for letting go. Now we say: let go. Trust in God's grace. Claim who we are called to be as God's church. God calls us all to come home.

Come home to a church that no longer calls our lives incompatible with Christian teachings. Come home to a church that listens when God calls people into ministry. Come home to a church that isn't afraid to include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people in its membership, its ministry, its deliberations, its clergy, its life. Come home to a church that has repudiated its own homophobia, recognized and works to overcome heterosexist attitudes and forthrightly includes sexual minority persons in its proclamations for human rights.

Alone, we find cynicism easier than hope and old patterns more comfortable than new vision. But we are not alone. We are surrounded and led by the love of God, who offers us a grace-filled alternative: reconciliation built on love, justice and a determination to see Christ in each other. Alone, we may not find the way, but we are not alone. Grace will lead us home.

The Witness Committee presented a platform statement and legislative packet for General Conference. Proposed legislation includes one resolution to oppose discrimination against lesbian, gay and bisexual people and another asking the UMC to hold meetings addressing "Heterosexism and the Mission of the Church. "

We recommend altering Paragraph 71F of the Social Principles by substituting a paragraph that describes the character of covenantal relationships

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...we recommend listing the basic rights of all persons...
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and by deleting the clause, "Although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teachings." In addition, we recommend listing the basic rights of all persons, adding a paragraph affirming rights regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, and adding sexual orientation to the Social Creed.

The Council affirmed a petition to celebrate the diversity of church members, permit the use of inclusive supplemental worship resources, delete references to "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness," delete the prohibition of ordination or appointment for "self-avowed practicing homosexuals," and delete the ban on general church funding for groups that "promote the acceptance of homosexuality."

Concerning definitions, Affirmation recommends that status be defined as "Those characteristics by which groups of people are identified, by which their common experiences may be shaped, and by which their legal character or condition may be determined."

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...recommend.."self-avowed practicing homosexual" <u>not</u> be defined.
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After considerable discussion, the National Council decided to recommend that the phrase "self-avowed practicing homosexual" <u>not</u> be defined. Instead, we ask that the following statement be attached to paragraph 402.2 if that paragraph is not deleted:

"Because the term 'self-avowed practicing homosexual' intends to describe behavior that is referenced by sexual orientation, and because the same standard is not applied to all persons regardless of sexual orientation, and not applied to all persons who self-avow that they are practicing their sexual orientation, we do not find it possible to create a definition of 'self-avowed practicing homosexual' that will be adequate to the constitutional test that requires the same standard for everyone regardless of status."

Interested parties may request a full legislative packet through the Affirmation mailbox or telephone number.

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...to continue contact with intercaucus connections.
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In other business, the Witness Committee made arrangements for presence at the General Conference press briefing in November 1995, planned to send Sam Wilson to the 1995 meeting of the National Council of Churches, agreed to participate in an interfaith meeting of lesbian, gay and bisexual caucuses, and planned to continue contact with intercaucus connections.

Jeanne Barnett wrote a letter to the President of Lindsey-Wilson College of Columbia, Kentucky, protesting the firing of lesbian coach Diana Chalfant.

John Boswell

John Eastburn Boswell, a gay historian and author, died on Dec. 24, 1994, due to complications from AIDS. He was 47 years old. He was a professor at Yale University who made academic history with his theories on the existence of homosexuality in medieval ages. He was a loved teacher at Yale University. It is reported that Boswell read and spoke 17 languages. This helped in his understanding original Christian text.

His first book, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe From the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* won the 1981 American Book Award for history. Boswell's book looks in depth at the mid-11th to mid-12th centuries of a pronounced gay sub-culture.

He is survived by his life partner of more than 20 years, Jerry Hart; his parents; a sister; and two brothers.